

After Midnight Thoughts

On Leopold Godowsky,

etc.

By Paul Howard

To The Members of The International Godowsky Society.

Instalment 12.

“Lavender and Old Lace.”

THE STORY OF DELIA PORTHAM AND ROSA WIDDER

“But the tender grace of a day that is dead  
Will never come back to me.”

- Tennyson.

Our London chief and dear friend, Clinton Gray-Fisk, told me in 1941 of a Mrs. Delia Portham who had a close acquaintance with Godowsky. I wrote to her, asking her to tell me at length of her association with him, and got back the following beautiful and historic letter (10 pages handwriting), rich in its echoes of an age which, as the Master himself said, “has been, and can never be again.”

oOo

Pinks Cottage      Codmore Hill

Pulborough   Sussex

ENGLAND.

January 8th, 1942

Dear Mr. Howard,

Your letter with all the enclosures arrived safely last week, thanks to our wonderful heroic Navy and Merchant Service. How welcome it was to be in touch with a kindred spirit - in spirit by the same love and admiration of a great man - our darling Popsie Godowsky. I should have to go back a great many years to start at the beginning of my personal recollections of him. I was only 13 years old when he first came to our house, brought by another great pianist, and his fervent admirer, Vladimir de Pachmann. How clear it all is to me - our home, my parents - who loved music, and Popsie. I was with my Mother down Regent Street, and ran into “Vlady” as they called him, and he began to enthuse about the then unknown Leopold Godowsky! I can see the scene, the excitable little man shrieking down my mother’s ear-trumpet (she was very deaf and carried an ear-trumpet swathed in black lace). To the amusement of the passers-by “Vlady” was screaming in his funny English about Godowsky. “I bring you the second greatest pianist, first is myself, but second is Godowsky.” He then asked what would she have for dinner! He loved his food! And what he could not eat he used to put aside and take away, and any special dainty. My mother excelled in them! Anyway, the great night arrived, and Godowsky came to our house - a little pale man, with a heavy dark moustache, a high domed head, and a sweet expression - I remember him clearly, and remember the locket he pulled out of his pocket to show us the miniature he carried of his adored wife; a young couple they were, facing life, no money, only his genius and his enthusiasm, and his terrific capacity for hard work.

I remember hiding under the piano, not to be sent off to bed - I was so thrilled by it all, for even then music was my great love - and Popsie played his own version of the last act of Tristan. I was so thrilled by it I began to sob, and he pulled me from under the piano and begged my parents to let

me remain, seeing how music affected me. From that moment I adored him, and always have ever since. He came a great deal to us from then onwards. We had a country house on the beautiful East Coast and when I was 16 he came, together with Fritz Kreisler, then an unknown violinist, to spend the summer. I remember the jokes he used to play like a sprite, his humour, and his sweetness, his high ideals, both of life and human relationship, and music. It was then he won my undying gratitude - by persuading my parents to allow me to go to Berlin where he lived then with his family, to begin my studies of singing - for I was born with a natural voice and a natural love of music, both of which have been my truest companions ever since - and he gave me encouragement, and the months I spent with him and his family are unforgettable - the music I heard - the wonderful atmosphere - his openhearted generosity. Alas, poor Popsie, I am afraid he was utterly disillusioned, for the greater the ideals the deeper one falls at times, but his spirit rose above all human hurts, which was a lesson, an inspiration, to all who knew him - quite apart from his music. I was privileged when at many a discussion of music, art, literature, which although I was too young and immature to appreciate things at their true value, sank into fertile ground. ← I used to sit in a corner and drink it all in and like seeds sown in Spring, their fruit in Autumn - or even in Winter - those days are never forgotten by me. Two dreadful devastating wars have come since - I look back over them to a ray of light, my memories - Berlin then, music and love of beauty in all forms - last war my boy was a baby, I thank God. Now he is a soldier away since 1939 with our first B.E.F. through Dunkirk. Safe, thank God. Last war found us in Belgium where I had gone in the summer of 1914 to meet Popsie, who had taken a villa on the Belgium coast for the summer with his school, who accompanied him from Vienna - where he then occupied the highest position and one unheard of for a Jew to occupy. It appears that when the position was offered to him, doubtless the heights of his dreams, the then Kaiser Josef said he would have to renounce his Jewish faith and be baptised, to which request he replied with his usual dignity that he would not buy the greatest honour at such a price. The Kaiser gave him the position and said to him "If all Jews behaved with your dignity we would have no Jewish problem!"

Well, my much looked forward to meeting with Popsie in 1914, my thrill in taking my baby son to meet him, was all horribly ended - by the time I arrived the Germans had started their invasion of Belgium, while their ministers were still talking "Peace". We both got away, and Popsie would never return to Vienna - his first disillusion and shock. He eventually went to America and began his life again, and for years we did not meet - those four dreadful years of war, though God knows not so dreadful as these - but when it was over - Paris was to be our next meeting place. In many ways I found him unchanged, hospitable, full of jokes, and of course working as hard as ever. How he could work as hard as he did I could never understand; the more people that were in the room the more he seemed able to isolate himself, and I can see him, standing by the piano, poring over his manuscripts quite alone - but surrounded - and he seemed able so suddenly switch into life going on around him.

Taking part in the conversation of his guests - more often than not self-invited ones, or as we call them here "Gate-crashers", he never noticed, and they all lingered for meals! A more put upon man I never met - too openhanded, too generous - an angel and a sprite... Alas, poor darling little Popsie was carried from the keyboard to a nursing home in London - he was recording Chopin Studies and Etudes, overworked, tired out, only his will power carried him on to the end, but he pushed his tired body and mind too far and had a stroke at the piano...

I was unfortunately away in Vienna when he was taken ill; on my return from Paris I heard of it, and got him moved to a Sanatorium in Switzerland; when I went to see him - and Matz - he was up, a shadow of himself. But his courage was undiminished, and beginning to practice on the little dummy piano to get his fingers to work again.

He recovered and eventually went to America - I never saw him alive again. When I heard of his death it seemed to me something had gone out of my life. Some light, a bond with the past, but he can never die, for he leaves a record of such moral courage, quite apart from his work, that it is for ever an inspiration to man. I thank God he did not live to see the horrors of today, but the memory of his courage has helped me often, for believe me I have needed a lot more than millions of others, but each one has got to go through their own Hell, and only faith and confidence can give us power to resist. People knew my boy from the time he was born and knew the love we have for each other - my only child and my dearest companion - he is again under overseas orders - but God will guard him I feel sure. This war cannot go on for ever, for right must triumph in the end, and we must all hang on till that end - I hope and pray.

!! I have lived in my little cottage on the hill since 1939 - my last guests were my old friends Josef Jangen, whom I met in 1014, and his wife. He had just resigned the directorship of the Conservatoire de Bruxelles. I had one long letter from him after he had fled before the invading hordes for the second time in his life - from a remote spot in France - his wife, two daughters, two tiny children, one only 6 weeks old - a letter full of the most noble sentiments. I have never heard from him again. I could write reams about other famous musicians - painters too - but Popsie was our subject.

I hope this letter will reach you. I should be grateful for an acknowledgement. I thank you for your enquiries as to my personal safety. We have all been through it. I must not write details, but we have carried on. I have produced potatoes, onions, etc., made jams and pickles, cooked in canteens, but now I am rather tired, my heart is strained. I am ordered a lot of rest, so rest while I can, having a dear little old French (Free French) woman to do my cooking and I knit endless pairs of gum boot stockings, etc., but music never leaves me, and I struggle up to London once a week, and in spite of my years am polishing up my voice (technically) to be able, please God, in Spring, to sing for the Red Cross. My darling son encourages me to do this, and I do it to encourage him, for he must also keep going and find pleasure in his work - I must not fail him. Each individual makes a world and so the world must continue its struggle.

I unpacked 4 cases of music a month of two ago, had not had time before: it was like meeting a dear friend: and I came across a volume of Bohemian Folk Songs I had given to Popsie in the Paris days! He must have left it in my flat on one of his visits to Paris. It is an interesting volume; also all the records, the ones he made when he was taken ill in London.

Well, dear Mr. Howard, this is a short story of a very long friendship, but my mind is so scattered by present events that it is an effort for me to concentrate in the past - I have had such an interesting life in the people I have met and known. I have letters, I often read them over again and wonder where these people are now - some like our Popsie - have passed on. Do you know of the famous French composer, Albert Roussel? Do you know of the famous Pro Arte Quartet formed during the last war? Now their leader Onnew is dead, God knows where the rest of them are - I

trust they were out on their summer holidays in the Ardennes when their country was again invaded and overrun. Letters from dear friends of mine - a famous Spanish painter, written from Madrid at the beginning of the Spanish tragedy. Where are they? And so on - if God only spares us to meet our friends again. To see our loved ones safe - to talk a little again of subjects of beauty, not violence. Maybe one day we shall meet and so talk of our Popsie, and I shall hear you play his music; how often I sat by his side while he played. Such poetry - such intimacy. It was beyond mere words of admiration for me - and I am indeed glad to have been in touch with you - united by our mutual love and admiration of a great musician and a great man.

With my very best wishes for your personal safety also,

Yours sincerely,

(sgd). Delia Portham.

oOo

I replied how delighted I was to have her letter, every line full of interest as well as some drama - (The mention of her son every few lines affected me like a leit-motiv of Wagnerian Opera. I said to one of my typiste's "What is going to happen to Delia if she loses her son?" And the girl answered, "You will lose her.")

I told her how the Master was virtually a prisoner in New York <sup>NY</sup> his last years, because the menacing atmosphere of Europe practically closed to him all the places he loved - Paris, Vienna, the Balearic Isles, etc., - and then his tragedies, his family, and the selfishness of the professionals who play nothing but standard works that are hackneyed, plus titbits and trash - the box office is the ceiling of their ambitions. I told her how I had many letters from him in which he opened his heart to me and told me of his griefs and aims, proving how relatively unimportant is the material; it is the spirit that tells.

As said my friend Father Austin McCarthy, a Passionist Monk, whom I have never met: "A letter or a word can frequently be more revealing than a meeting. At least even a written word involves mystery and almost miracle. Mystery in the sense that it achieves an effect with material symbol which is entirely incommensurate with what one should reasonably expect of the mere material." And Godowsky's personality and great-heartedness, although I never met him, overwhelmed me all those thousands of miles away.

I told her I felt a personal friendship for her, not only on account of her association with the great Master, but also because of her deep personality and large-heartedness.

Then came her second letter! (I had quoted some paragraphs of her first letter in one of mine to Rose Widder of Cleveland, OHIO, U.S.A., and you will see the sequel, as it turned out that Rosa and Delia had been girls together in Berlin, Delia Defries living with the Godowskys, and Rosa Habermann there too, studying piano.)

Pinks Cottage      Codmore Hill

Pulborough Sussex

ENGLAND

August 4th, 1942.

Dear Mr. Howard,

I am so glad you received my letter. I wondered if it would ever arrive and was sorry I had not made a copy of it, but I just dashed it off as it came into my mind on a bitterly cold and dreary January morning, and sent it. I am so impatient, and once a thing is done I feel I could never do it again - the only thing I have patience for is my singing; I am not a pianist, though piano repertoire is dear to me, especially Popsie's; many a time I have sat by his side listening to his exquisite poetry - I told you I gave him a volume of Bohemian and Czech Folk Songs, which he loved - it lay on his piano in Paris - I have it now - it is precious - I do not know if he ever used any of the songs. I have been back in technical study since last October. I had sung too much without a real technical foundation - carried always by music and gifted with a natural voice - Popsie used to say I was more musically gifted than many of his pupils, and the music always came first to me, but latterly I found my voice would not obey my musical feelings. Then came the War, and I remained here in this cottage on the hill - stunned - but working bodily, cooking, scrubbing gardening, till I sweated and was worn out, - anything not to think, let my imagination get control of me. Made hundreds of pounds of jam (before sugar rationing) and so on, but late in 1941 came in contact through friends with a wonderful old man gardener - fate - friends persuaded me it was time I gave up a little of what I was doing here, and I began to sing. My darling boy also encouraged me - and so I started right back at zero, and at last began to see daylight and acquire the technique, and hope and trust this winter to restart singing all the music I love - Schumann, Schubert, Brahms, Faure, Debussy, Chausson, Duparc, Darius Milhaud, etc. I can accompany myself but do not care to - Bach Passion, Bach Cantata are amongst my loves - Beethoven Sacred Songs, and hundreds of gems, and singing with quartet. I wish Popsie had written for the voice.

By the way, I had a letter from Rosa Habermann (Widder); we were together as girls in Berlin, I studied singing (I was 16 and living with Godowskys) and she piano. It is through you I have come together with her again - Thank you! So much seems to come to me - you, my professor, and my dear darling old cook, 25 years with me, retired, now here with me again, 75 years old but a real help and like a mother. All in a way through my boy. He wrote her as he was going overseas - she wrote to me - and here she is. My boy made me take up singing again, and in town I met Clinton Gray-Fisk - and you - and through you Rosa Habermann! And so interest in life has come back...

I trust you will get this letter also, and the photo I sent two days ago - it is old but I have no others - only snaps.

Now I am going to hunt in my cases for a volume of Duparc and a volume of Faure I heard most beautifully interpreted last night on the wireless. I am so impatient to begin, but must hold myself back until I am completely master of myself, and so able to use my voice as an instrument to

interpret anything and all glorious poems. Divine music - I have four cases of nothing but music, precious indeed in these days.

Do you know Verdi's Requiem? Oh, it is divine - but too sad - some music does not bear singing now, the words of one song of Faure's makes it quite impossible to sing, for I have too many tears in my throat. The words are by Jean Richopin, a famous French poet, always rather tragic writer. Here it is:-

Heureux qui meurt ici  
Ainsi que les oiseaux des champs  
Son Corps, Pres de amis  
Et mis dans l'herbe, et dans les chants  
Il dort, d'un bon sommeil vermeil  
Sous le ciel radieux.

Tout ceux qu'il a connu, venus  
Lui font de longs adieux ---  
A sa croix, les parents pleurants  
Restent agenouilles  
Et ses os, sous les fleurs  
Sont doucement mouilles.

Chacun sur le bois noir  
Peut voir s'il était jeune, ou non -  
Il peur avec de vrais regrets  
L'appeler par son nom -  
Combien plus malchanceux sont ceux  
Qui meurent a la mer  
Et, sous le flot profond, s'en vont  
Loin de pays aime.  
Ah! Pauvres, qui pour seuls linceuls  
ont les goemons verts,  
Ou l'on roule inconnus, tout nu -  
Et les yeux grands ouvert!

You can imagine it is difficult to sing this song today. The music is magnificent - the horrors of "Les yeux grands ouvert", I can see it, and it brings back to my mind the last war - I was at the sea with my boy, the waves were rolling in and I saw a dark shape rolled up, and washed up repeatedly until finally the sea gave up its prey, and a poor fisherman, a sailor was washed up on the shore - his eyes were open - the fish were swimming through them - I shall never forget.

Do you know Beethoven's Sacred Songs? Do you know 'Les Beatitudes' of Cesar Franck? You know we singers also have a huge repertoire of magnificent music. As I write of it I feel my longing to begin again surging within me, but I will not begin until October. One year of solid technical study - gather in the apples and pears, make jam, bottle my plums, and then! Please God, to London - and music! I have a fine pianist, a real musician, for me when I am ready. It's thrilling!

I enclose a snap of myself - Spanish Morocco.

I have not heard from <sup>c</sup>Clinton Gray-Fisk at all.

Please let me know if you receive this letter - and also the photo, and how you all are - my darling boy is in India - God guard our boys.

Your friend (I am, I hope)

(Sgd). Delia Portham.

oOo

In October, 1942, Delia sent me a large photograph of herself, exquisite profile, the loveliest I have ever seen, the incomparable nose, and the priceless throat, classic, patrician. I wrote thanking her and asked "Did you gather in the harvest, bottle the plums, and go?" The next word came from Gray-Fisk; Delia had died (May 1943). How fortunate I discovered her before it was too late. Looking over the rapid succession of dates - Jan 1942 (first letter); my reply; August 1942 (her second); the photo (October 1942), and then no more. It likened this rich association to a blazing meteor trailing swiftly in the evening sky, just as life (someone has said) is a flash of light between two eternities. Later I heard from M. Colin Defries, Delia's brother, that she had a stroke. Mr. Defries's wife is Moura Lympany, whose superlative achievement in recording Rachmaninoff's 24 Preludes is a landmark.

#### MY OHIO ROSE.

The Rose Widder mentioned is an old friend of mine, though we have never met (c.f. again Fr. McCarthy's remarks on the miracle of the written word). Rose was a lifelong dear friend of the Master. I met her in the pages of the New York "Musical Courier" in June 1933. She had written berating the world's pianists for neglecting the works of Godowsky, the greatest composer for the Pianoforte in history. I wrote to her reproaching her for ignoring me in the matter, as it had appeared in the Courier several times that I played G's works. This was the start of a delightful correspondence running into many scores of letters, some of which follow - (it is hard to know what to leave out!).

Here is her challenge in the "Courier".

June 3, 1933

Musical Courier.

#### VARIATIONS.

By Leonard Liebling

From Rose Widder, Musical courier correspondent in Cleveland, Ohio:  
 "Do you, Mr. Liebling, expect any answers to your question, why



pianists do not use more of Godowsky's works for performance? You once published facetiously the fact that Godowsky referred to you as the pianist who performs the easiest pieces with the greatest difficulty. What then, would you do with these monuments of a master mind? Have you ever tried to unravel successfully those intricacies of the Passacaglia, the many-voiced Bach transcriptions, the exquisite delicacies of some Chopin studies? To have heard the Master in these is prohibitive to us poor mortals. Years and years of untiring devoted efforts are prime requisites - and in addition - all the rest; perfect finger technique, brains, musicianship, understanding, and the will to forgo everything else, unlimited devotion to the task and then - nothing but a faint semblance of the Godowsky mastery as a result. I have never done any of his works to my own satisfaction, you, Mr. Liebling, know as well as I do. Perhaps future generations will produce more pianists of the required type! But, of course, Giesecking, Horowitz, Hofmann, Rachmaninoff can attempt them!"

oOo

And here are some of her letters to me:-

2741 Hampshire Road,  
Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A.  
Sept. 25, 1933.

"...I do not know whether you ever had the good fortune of personal contact and study with this great man as I have had. I was in Berlin for three years, studying with him at a time when I was merely enthusiastic, but by far too young to grasp his towering musical and intellectual greatness.

As the years progress, I am more convinced that in our era there is no musician who can compare with him in exquisite taste, profound musicianship and exhaustive knowledge of his chosen instrument. His purely pianistic concept of music makes his compositions outstanding in today's output. I remember several years ago sending him one of my programs containing some of his compositions and writing him the following: I have put you on the program where you rightfully belong: between Bach and Chopin. His masterful contrapuntal style applied to the exquisite chopinesque atmosphere of his works keep the truth of my statement alive. — — — — —

? chopin Etudes? Did you ever hear him dream them on the piano? That is what the Germans call an "Erlebnis". I envy you your infinite time and leisure to have accumulated as extensive and comprehensive a repertoire of Godowsky works; I am sorry to say that I am not so fortunate as to be able to allow myself such luxury, although I cannot conceive of anything approaching musical paradise more closely..."

oOo

She told me, Dec. 22, 1933:-

“...After having studied in Berlin I returned to the U.S.; as a part of our family lived in Central Europe I travelled back and forth several times, finally marrying and living in Europe for 14 years; my husband served as major in the world war (Austrian-Hungarian army); I too, was on the Russian frontier for many months; needless to say that music was forsaken for martial matters. By a curious coincidence Godowsky was made an honorary colonel in the same army when he was a member of the royal Vienna Music Academy; but that was in times of peace, and he came to N.Y. from Ostende at the outbreak of the war, leaving everything behind him. The sad upheaval in Europe brought many to these shores who otherwise would have preferred to live in the cultural European atmosphere; however, all that has undergone a drastic change, and in the past ten years, since our renewed American sojourn, we have seen the tide turn towards America in art and culture. Germany, I am afraid, is beginning its retrogression to the middle ages. But politics should not really take up valuable space in our correspondence.

Your fifteen programs made me gasp in bewildered admiration for your almost unbelievable capacity. Where is there a professional artist, now before the public, who has a like record to his credit? They are truly, as G. says, commercial artists, selling their wares. Adelaide, through your idealistic concept of the pianistic art, knows more about the great Godowsky, more about the psychology of the music performed, than any other civilized community was ever taught in program notes, and I am proud and feel highly honoured to be the recipient of everything you are kind enough to send me. Some of my musical friends had the privilege of becoming acquainted with your programs and notes, and I can assure you they too were nonplussed...”

oOo

Speaking of Franz Liszt and of Godowsky (June 22nd, 1934), I had told her that I perused the entire works of many composers before they went into the shelves, and when it came to Liszt it meant 1300 of them.

“...But can you tell me how it is possible to play Liszt night after night until going through (horribledictu) 1300 compositions?!! All those runs, trills, embellishments, noisy, meaningless, showy? Great genius as he was, still the master showman, brilliant magician, glittering poseur! And our great little, modest, quiet genius, Godowsky, enthroned on Olympian heights, far above the horizon of the strutting musical celebrities, intoxicated with their own insignificant endowments and achievements; how naturally and quietly he pours forth these divinely conceived melodic modulations, aglow with the light of his innermost soul! And all these dudes of the music profession strut their stuff, embellish it with noisy propaganda and succeed for the time being. Is there any sense of justice in the world?...”

oOo

New York,  
July 17, 1934.

My dear Mr. Howard,

Our great master is always an inspiration: we spent the afternoon yesterday together; my heart

went out to him - he seems so lonely in spite of continual visitors. His son-in-law, David Saperton, was in the giving vein and played excerpts of the Java suite, the Passacaglia, Six Etudes, Chopin Waltz, Strauss Kunstlerleben, for me marvellously. I was really thrilled - on his piano there was only Godowsky - also the Sonata, but I did not have the heart to drive him into it after so generous a program in the heat.

You know, Saperton is Josef Hofmann's right hand at the Curtis Institute. Shall be with them all this week - Leonard Lieblich is, of course, in Europe. I spoke of you and your devotion to our great master - he smiled his kindly smile, little sad smile, and was appreciative of your devotion. I wonder if he will play for me. We embraced - I stifled my tears - why is fate so cruel to this great man, full of bounty and benevolence to all mankind?

I told him how fine David's playing was and he questioned me about every piece - I think it is a great calamity of his life that he should be handicapped in interpreting his own compositions, (arthritis was coming on?), as there is no one in this or any future generation that will ever equal his exquisite aristocracy in execution.

I am happy to think of the pleasure this missive bears for you, - and hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd). Rose H. Widder.

The following were endorsed on Mrs. Widder's letter. Wasn't it kind of her to get these messages to me? She has a heart.)

"Greetings to you as a Godowsky enthusiast, by instigation of Mrs. Rose Habermann-Widder.

(Sgd). David Saperton."

"A special greeting from your piano victim and phantom friend, who admires you inordinately for your great courage. X

(Sgd). Leopold Godowsky."

"Best regards,

(Sgd). Shura Cherkassky."

oOo

September 14, 1934.

"...My thoughts have wandered to Adelaide repeatedly after having sent you that letter from New York; I know what it will mean to you to know that we conversed at length about you and your

devoted work and love on behalf of our great master. The hours I was privileged to spend with him are unforgettable. He is the very essence of charm and affability, and an ingratiating, unassuming personality; he is keen and alert to the constellations of world powers; absolutely in touch with everything of interest in every phase of life. Somewhat bitter and disappointed towards the havoc fate wrought with him, but absolutely uncompromising in the art of music.

Here he demands the utmost, minutest observing of detail, his naturally complicated musical nature making almost supernatural demands upon the performer. (I can guarantee that Rosa is right. P.H.) ...If Godowsky could be surrounded by worshippers as we both are, I am sure many unpleasant experiences would be averted from him; I am not satisfied with the atmosphere in which he lives; daily cares, worries, materialistic problems are no food for that exotic fragrant flower: Godowsky's soul. Did I tell you that he is finally, after 20 years of roaming the world, having his precious belongings shipped from Vienna and when I expressed my satisfaction and hope that he would retrieve the atmosphere surrounding those objects, he resignedly said: "What has been, will and can never be again."

oOo

Among other things I told Mrs Widder (2/6/36):-

About Angel, our kitten, the other night he was sitting beside the little stool containing the supper tray, and Leo commenced Dohnanyi's records of orchestral variations of a nursery tune. Just as the subject commenced Angel, whose movements are very sudden and unexpected, rose from the floor and landed on the centre of the supper tray with one leg in the butter and his nose in a cup of tea. Another night - he will prowl about inside the piano while I am playing - he was sitting on the long bass strings when I came down on them with a heavy fist. With a yell he leaped right out of the piano and half-way across the room. He doesn't sit on the strings now.

oOo

And on 15th March, 1940:-

Dear friend Rosa,

although I think of no one but you all the time, no letter has come from you for many moons. Different sorts of birds come into the garden, spend their time building their nests, singing their songs - they make their little peculiar notes and signals - and fly off for others to inhabit the tenements awhile. The saucy willy-wagtails, the Murray magpies, and the bit magpies, they are here now since the doves, the bats, and the owls retired for a time, and the lawns have grown and the tennis courts are in good playing condition and the flower beds are bursting, and the Zinnias are here again, and there are tennis tournaments about every Sunday afternoon when my children - why call them children, they are young elephants and wild tigers - invite their different parties of friends down. And all the week the lawn-mower buzzing and the sprinklers playing and the water bill going up, but no Leopold and no letter from Rosa season after season.

oOo

When Godowsky died Rosa wrote (Dec. 2, 1938):-

“Whither is he vanished? And what seemed corporal melted as breath into the wind! Are there words to express out grief and pain? Is it possible that I shall never again hear that beautifully toned voice, gaze into those kindly, oft mischievous eyes, kiss those magic hands?”

On Nov. 21, 3p.m. I received a wire from Leonard: “Our beloved Godowsky-----”, and everything went dark before my eyes; immediately Milty called me - the Press had received the news; the world was dark tome - I can not yet realise it! Of course he lives - his genius hovers about us - but still - he is gone! His weak heart could not resist the strain of a serious operation which must have been suddenly decided upon - for three weeks before Beryl Rubinstein gave a recital in New York playing the Kunsterlerleben: Godowsky was present and was grand to Beryl.

It can't be true! And today your precious letters with the one to Leonard, so true and - horrible dictu - so timely - a quotation from George Eliot's “Lifted Veil”. I would love to answer you at length about everything you sent me - but you will believe me if I say I cannot today; I must let time pass over this terrible wound... But I do want to send you a line so you know how my soul aches.”

oOo

In another letter (Nov. 23, 1937) she mentioned:-

“The Master gave me a letter he had just received from Josef Hofmann in which he expressed his deepfelt gratitude for Godowsky's dedication of the four Schubert Transcriptions to him, and he said: ‘I do not exaggerate if I say that never before has there been a genius comparable to yours, dear Leopold, nor can we expect any to equal it in the near future’.”

oOo

In a letter of May 20, 1940, she told me of a visit to New York, and to David Saperton:-

“...He played a Godowsky program for me, superb - a marvel in subtle shadings, superlative technique, power, strength, intelligence, delicacy and masterful conception. The Passacaglia, a monument of architectural beauty; Java, tropical picture of thousands of glittering dewdrops; the Etudes almost unbelievable in their dazzling, shimmering, intellectual transformation; he played with astounding ease and great physical strength under perfect control. The Trians in its pointed rhythm almost lifted you from your seat. He loved to play for me - especially as he felt I knew every move, understood every meaning, appreciated every problem of difficulty and admired its solution.”

oOo

In a letter of mine to her (3rd. April, 1941):-

“Here is a music lesson with my devoted, excitable, impetuous, electrifying daughter Mary.

Subject, the tied grace notes in Lullaby of the Triakontameron. I say, "Darling, you have not got that quite right, the upper note must not be struck again though it will sound as though it were." I put my fingers on the keys to demonstrate and she won't move hers away and so there is a dog fight. I say "Won't you listen to me?" She says, "You don't expect me to swallow everything you tell me, do you?!!" That is the finish, I am in my gardening clothes, and I am very busy, having come in just to oblige her. I do not get the least bit cross. I say, "All right, sweetheart, just go on practising by yourself and I will get back to my seedlings", and off I go into the garden. Ten seconds later Mary is in the kitchen and in a flaming rage and scalding tears, telling Mother I am impossible, and sobs "I would like to break a milk jug over his head". Thirty seconds after that she meets me in the passage and kisses and hugs me convulsively with glistening eyes and a radiant face. Anyway she is playing the Lullaby very beautifully."

oOo

And (linking up with Delia Portham) Roas said (June 17th, 1942):-

Anent Clinton Gray-Fisk: In his letter to you of April 9, '41, he mentioned DELIA Portham, and it flashed thru my mind immediately: What if it is Delia Defries, who spent a season in Berlin with the Godowskys when I studied with the Master? And I have intended to write her - but in the rush and flurry of our life the letter remained unwritten. Today I am certain thanks to your wonderful system of generously giving of your own experience and joy to us poor mortals - she was one of the most gorgeous, exquisitely beautiful girls, blond, lovely - very sensitively musical; the Master had brought her and her sister Milly - quite a different type - taller, more slender, dark - to Berlin as their guests. Of course we were together a great deal, in fact we corresponded when I returned to America - I still have a dozen or so snapshots that she sent me - and I am going to write to her immediately. The Godowsky family spent one summer's vacation with them in Cromer, Overstrand; I think Maurice Aronson went there from Chicago - they wanted me to come and spend the summer too, but I lost a sister in that summer, and my parents, in their infinite sorrow and grief, wanted me at home. So my journey to England did not materialise. The tone of Delia's letter is so resigned; I just looked at these photos - she was dashing and vivacious - in a lovely country home - typically English squires as if taken from old Scott or Dickens writings.

Life has drawn a veil over those years when we looked through rose-coloured glasses - two wars and all the experience that goes with it. And now I am indebted to you, dear friend, for recreating those days of exquisite fancy through your world-wide all-embracing interest and bounty!

Delia's letter is most interesting, in fact, I took up the thread with Godowsky where she left off - that is, after he had his breakdown in London and recuperated in Switzerland. He told me that the ordeal of making records in London was terrific, the technique of waxing was still in its infancy - he had to change his whole manner of playing in order to achieve some semblance of an effect as if it were Godowsky playing - and he cracked under the strain of that experience. Naturally, it was an accumulation of many years of nerve-racking work and existence - such colossal genius, so delicate a structure as was his physique - had to pay a terrific price."

oOo

And so the letters have gone on - no space to quote more here: but here are a few orchids she threw (and we take a bow!).

"...Your wonderful work, aided and abetted by your Mountain, is one of the most imposing and monumental tributes ever paid to the memory of a little understood genius. I marvel at your enthusiasm, your energy, the expression of your belief and faith in what we know to be the truth - but what is being assailed by petty fury - it takes at least an atom of genius to feel the presence of an overpowering great man - little souls can only measure according to their own concepts!"

oOo

Dear, wise, generous, bighearted Mohammed:

Your Instalment 5 - reverting with such great benevolence, understanding, and - yes - nothing short of genius - to the memory of our beloved and deserving friend Leonard, has moved me to tears: your work of love on the composite issue of Midnight Thoughts is a fitting monument to our great Master and his devoted, magnificent disciple. The poetry in your soul lets you see and understand the inner greatness of the Master more than anyone who has known him personally."

oOo

A similar soul is Palmer Kent of Sydney, Australia. He writes:-

"Paul, you dear, brilliant, miracle man,

The more I read your "After Midnight Thoughts" - (a damn good title) - the more I admire your love, your enthusiasm, your profound knowledge, and your continued tenacity of purpose, year after year, for a great and worthy cause.

Richard Curle in his "Today and Tomorrow" wrote that just a few people here and there served as an inspiration to others, and thus made the British Empire. You are surely one of them.

I had no idea just how very much is required in the playing of Godowsky until reading your Instalments - Nos. 9 and 10 arrived this week TAC A MIKA. To think I was once the music critic of a monthly magazine. My Gosh!"

oOo

I like Palmer Kent - he is encouraging and lets one know that one is not talking to the wind. Atomic energy will have to go some to keep up with him - a chief of Secret Service during the war, referendum propagandist, - whatever he is, it becomes the middle of a fight, - wielded the orchestral baton some, real lover of music, plays piano some.

About one in a hundred of our members send me a line to acknowledge all these immortal screeds, so that is why I like Palmer Kent so much, and the score or two of others who keep in touch and suggest ideas.

But I shall not whimper any more about those who do not acknowledge my screeds, for a learned gentleman, a young priest of courtly bearing, prefaced a lovely letter to me with:-

“It is not on record that the Apostle Paul received any replies to his epistles to the Corinthians.”

Sure I had led with my chin!

I wish you, dear Member, all the joys of the festive season - now 20.12.46 that I post this proof, - though I fear you may not receive it till nearer Easter.

Your,

Mohammed.

P.S. Mountain says we must start a cross index for these epistles, and send interim, adding to it as the epistles multiply.

Mohammed.